

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 00271 041334Z

44

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-11 AID-05 OMB-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 PC-01 /093 W

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R 041115Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5081

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY MADRID

RUFNPBVXAMEMBASSY PARIS 820

AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0271

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINS CASC MR FR SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: OUTLOOK IN ZOUERATE

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 225 (NOTAL)

1. FRENCH AMBASSADOR GAUTIER AND FRENCH CONSUL IN NOUADHBIU VISITED ZOUERATE JANUARY 29-31. AMBASSADOR REPORTS SECURITY IN IRON ORE MINING AREA IS IN HAND AND FRENCH COMMUNITY IS IN REASONABLY GOOD SPIRITS.

2. IN WAKE NEW YEAR'S EVE ATTACK BY POLISARIO/ALGERIAN FORCE, MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT HAS INCREASED ZOUERATE GARRISON TO 600 MEN. SMALL SQUADS PATROL INDUSTRIAL AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS FREQUENTLY AND AGGRESSIVELY THROUGHOUT NIGHT. COMINOR AIDED BY ARMY HAS BEGUN CONSTRUCTION OF EARTHWORK RING AROUND ENTIRE COMPLEX--SEVEN-METER DITCH WITH PARALLEL DUNE TO BE TOPPED BY ELECTRIFIED BARBED WIRE (340 VOLTS) AND GUARD POSTS EVERY KILO-METER. RING WILL LIMIT ENTRY TO TOWN TO TWO POINTS. AT MOMENT, BARRIER IS MORE OF MORALE THAN MILITARY FACTOR. (ZOUERATE HAD CLOSE CALL DECEMBER 31: 120MM MORTAR SHELLS DUG CRATERS JUST FEW METERS FROM GASOLINE DUMP.)

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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 00271 041334Z

3. SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF FRENCH TECHNICIANS PACKED THEIR FAMILIES OFF TO FRANCE WEEK FOLLOWING ATTACK. JANUARY 1 FRENCH POPULATION OF 1102 DROPPED TO 694 ON JANUARY 8. BY JANUARY 29, POPULATION WAS DOWN TO 348. SOME WIVES AND CHILDREN REMAIN, BUT MOST OF THIS NUMBER ARE ACTUAL MINOR EMPLOYEES. IN SAME VEIN, MINOR EXECUTIVES ARE NOT REPORTING PRESSING FOR RECRUITMENT OF NEW EXPATRIATE TECHNICIANS DESPITE STAFF VACANCIES.

4. AFTER BRIEFING MINOR AUTHORITIES IN NOUAKCHOTT AND GOVERNOR IN ZOUERATE, AMBASSADOR INFORMED ASSEMBLED FRENCH COMMUNITY THAT FRENCH GOVERNMENT STOOD READY TO AIRLIFT ALL FRENCH NATIONALS OUT OF ZOUERATE IN MATTER OF HOURS. (GAUTIER TOLD ME THAT PARTICULAR FRENCH MILITARY UNITS AND SPECIFIC AIRCRAFT HAVE ALREADY BEEN TASKED.) ENTIRE ZOUERATE FRENCH COMMUNITY CAN BE MOVED OUT IN LESS THAN ONE DAY. SHOULD AIRSTRIP BE BLOCKED, EVACUATION PLAN CALLS FOR OVERLAND MOVEMENT VIA LITTLE KNOWN DESERT TRACK TO ATAR IN MINOR AND PRIVATE VEHICLES (THREE-HOUR TRIP). CASCADE SYSTEM PER-77 MITS ASSEMBLY EVHIRE COMMUNITY READY TO GO IN ONE HOUR. SINCE EVACUATION OF FRENCH COMMUNITY WOULD CLOSE DOWN MINES, DECISION WILL NOT BE MADE LIGHTLY.

5. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER IT WOULD BE ACCURATE TO SAY ZOUERATE COMMUNITY WAS "IN GOOD SPIRITS", GAUTIER DEMURRED, NOTING CHARACTERIZATION WAS TRIFLE TOO UPBAT. "ALL WOULD CLEARLY RATHER BE ON COTE D'AZUR." BUT WITH GOOD MESSHALLS, A COUPLE OF TWO-STAR RESTAURANTS, TENNIS COURTS, TWO SWIMMING POOLS, AND NUMBER OF CINEMAS, MINOR FRENCH STAFF MANAGES TO LEAD A GOOD IF SLIGHTLY UNEASY LIFE. HANDY SIDE

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